

CONFUSION ABOUT TONGUES

Updated and enlarged May 2, 2006 (first published April 9, 2002) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) –

Since I was saved in the summer of 1973, I have seen many attempts at “tongues speaking.” Not once have I heard anything like a biblical tongue, which is a real earthly language. For example, while attending Celebration Jesus 2000 in St. Louis with press credentials, I witnessed great confusion about tongues.

Jack Hayford’s book on tongues was published a few years ago by a non-Pentecostal publisher, and while speaking in St. Louis Hayford reported that many non-Pentecostals and non-Charismatics have learned to “speak in tongues” by reading his book. Charismatic practices are increasing rapidly in non-Pentecostal groups such as the Southern Baptist Convention. *Charisma* magazine, March 1999, contained a report entitled “Shaking Southern Baptist Tradition,” which gave many examples of charismatic Southern Baptist congregations.

I remember being very perplexed about tongues as a new Christian. I was led to the Lord in the summer of 1973 by an old-line Pentecostal man; and the night that happened in a motel room in Daytona Beach, Florida, he prayed that I would receive the gift of tongues. The next day we parted ways and I have never seen him again, but for the first few months after that, I sought wisdom from the Lord on the subject of tongues. I visited Assemblies of God churches, attended a Nicky Cruz crusade, and diligently studied the Bible. I wanted everything the Lord had for me, and I wanted to obey Him in all things, but instead of giving me the gift of tongues the Lord gave me the understanding that it was a temporary gift that is not for today.

The reasons I rejected the tongues of the modern Pentecostal-Charismatic movement 32 years ago are same the reasons that I rejected the “tongues” I witnessed in St. Louis in 2000. Consider four of those reasons:

CHARISMATIC TONGUES CAN BE LEARNED

According to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, tongues-speaking is something that can be learned. At New Orleans ’87, another conference I attended with press credentials, the participants were invited to stay for “after glow” sessions following the evening meetings. At these sessions, the people were instructed in how to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit” and “speak in tongues.” First, they were led in a sinner’s prayer, then they were proclaimed “baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Next, they were instructed simply to close their

minds and open their mouths and to speak gibberish, believing that God would turn this into “tongues.”

In St. Louis 2000, Catholic Bishop Sam Jacobs of Alexandria, Louisiana, taught the people simply to open their mouths and talk like babies. He said that once they learned to speak in baby “tongues,” they could eventually learn to speak as adults. Foursquare Gospel pastor Jack Hayford, who has been mis-labeled “the Pentecostal Gold Standard” by *Christianity Today*, said much the same thing. When his daughter was worried that her “tongues” was not a real language, he encouraged her that she had to “start somewhere” and that she should ask God to increase her ability.

My friends, this business of learning to speak in tongues is nothing more than absolute nonsense. There is not even a hint in the Bible that the gift of tongues can be taught to someone or that those who received the gift in the apostolic churches had to develop it as if they were actually learning to speak. There are no baby tongues in the Bible! The genuine biblical gift of tongues was a supernatural gift. It was a miracle. If this is not unscriptural heresy, there is no such thing. God commands that His people reject such things. Those who ignore the Bible’s teaching and shut their eyes to heresy and rush on in an attempt to receive a charismatic experience open themselves to great delusion.

CHARISMATIC TONGUES DO NOT HAVE TO BE PRACTISED UNDER THE DIRECTIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14

I have observed Charismatic tongues-speaking in many churches and conferences, including three of the largest: New Orleans (1987), Indianapolis (1990), and St. Louis (2000); but I have never witnessed tongues-speaking practiced in obedience to the apostolic instructions of 1 Corinthians 14.

Paul said, “Forbid not to speak in tongues,” but he also gave many serious restrictions on how tongues could be used. I have never seen the practice of “tongues” in modern times restrained in the following manner.

* Tongues are to be spoken only by course, one by one (“*If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course...*” 1 Cor. 14:27). In most of the Pentecostal-Charismatic meetings I have attended the “tongues” were spoken by many people at once.

* Tongues must be interpreted (“*If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret*” 1 Cor. 14:27). Rarely are the tongues messages interpreted in modern Pentecostalism, and when they are it is usually obvious that the “interpretation” is something different than the “tongue.”

* There is to be no confusion or lack of peace (*“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints”* 1 Cor. 14:33). Every time I have been in a Pentecostal-Charismatic service where “the Spirit was moving” I have thought to myself, “This is confusing.” Disorder reigns. The “tongues” cannot be understood. Things happen that make no sense and that are not found in the Bible. But we are told that God is not the author of confusion, and that covers a lot of territory.

* Women are not allowed to speak in tongues (*“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law”* 1 Cor. 14:34). If you could remove the women from the modern tongues-speaking movement it would collapse, but the Spirit of God plainly forbids them to speak in tongues or to prophecy in the meetings where the saints are gathered together and men are present. Women are allowed to teach women (Titus 2:3-4) and children (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15) but are forbidden to teach or usurp authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12).

* Those who are truly spiritual will acknowledge Paul’s authority (*“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord”* 1 Cor. 14:37). Many times when I have shown these restrictions to Pentecostals and Charismatics they have argued against them and given various reasons why they don’t feel obligated to obey them. This only proves that they are not truly spiritual and are not truly attuned to and obedient to the voice of Almighty God. They are self-deceived.

* Everything is to be decent (*“Let all things be done decently”* 1 Cor. 14:40). The Greek word translated decent is “euschemonos” and it is also translated “honestly” (Rom. 13:13; 1 Thes. 4:12). It carries the idea of moral decency and honesty, of adorning the gospel of Jesus Christ and the church of Jesus Christ in such a manner that no reproach is brought upon it by our actions. When we think about the deception and fraud that is so prevalent in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and when we think about the many times that women are allegedly overcome by the Spirit and fall in an indecent manner and have to be covered with a blanket by women pre-assigned to that task, it is obvious that all things are not done decently.

* Everything is to be orderly (*“Let all things be done decently and in order”* 1 Cor. 14:40). The God of creation is the God of order. He is not the God of confusion and disorder.

George Gardiner was a Pentecostal for many years, and he said that his journey out of Pentecostalism “began with nagging questions about the gulf between Charismatic practices and Scriptural statements--a very wide gulf!” (Gardiner, *The Corinthian Catastrophe*, p. 8). He determined to study the book of Acts. “I reread the book of Acts, slowly and carefully, praying as I did, ‘Lord Let me see what it says, and only what the

Word says. Give me grace to accept it if I have been wrong and grace to apologize if I have been unduly critical. The journey through Acts was an eye opener! The actions and experiences of the early churches were far removed from the actions and 'experiences' of the modern movement. In some ways they were completely opposite!"

I discovered the same thing as a young Christian. One thing that convinced me that Pentecostalism is not scriptural was that their "tongues" were not practiced in a biblical manner.

CHARISMATIC TONGUES ARE NOT A REAL LANGUAGE

The tongues of the New Testament were real earthly languages. It was a divinely-given ability to speak a language that the person had never learned, and thus was a miraculous sign. That's what Acts 2 plainly says.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that EVERY MAN HEARD THEM SPEAK IN HIS OWN LANGUAGE. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And HOW HEAR WE EVERY MAN IN OUR OWN TONGUE, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:4-8).

Early Pentecostal leaders understood this and claimed that their tongues were real earthly languages. They even thought they would be able to go to foreign mission fields and witness through miraculous tongues without having to learn the languages. Those who attempted this, though, returned bitterly disappointed!

"Alfred G. Garr and his wife went to the Far East with the conviction that they could preach the gospel in 'the Indian and Chinese languages.' Lucy Farrow went to Africa and returned after seven months during which she was alleged to have preached to the natives in their own 'Kru language.' The German pastor and analyst Oskar Pfister reported the case of a Pentecostal... 'Simon,' who had planned to go to China using tongues for preaching. Numerous other Pentecostal missionaries went abroad believing they had the miraculous ability to speak in the languages of those to whom they were sent. These Pentecostal claims were well known at the time. S.C. Todd of the Bible Missionary Society investigated eighteen Pentecostals who went to Japan, China, and India 'expecting to preach to the natives in those countries in their own tongue,' and found that by their own admission 'in no single instance have [they] been able to do so.' As these and other missionaries returned in disappointment and failure, Pentecostals were compelled to rethink their original view of speaking in tongues" (Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*).

The conclusion was soon reached by the early Pentecostals that their “tongues” were not earthly languages, but a “heavenly” or special prayer language; and those are the terms we heard frequently at the conferences in New Orleans, Indianapolis, and St. Louis. Yet the tongues that I heard in these conferences were not languages of any sort, but merely repetitious mumblings that anyone could imitate. Larry Lea supposedly spoke in tongues in Indianapolis in 1990, and this is a key example of what is being passed off for tongues in the Charismatic movement. It went something like this: “Bubblyida bubblyida hallelujah bubblyida hallabubbly shallabubblyida kolabubblyida gloooooory hallelujah bubblyida.” I wrote that down as he was saying it and later checked it against the tape. Nancy Kellar, a Roman Catholic nun who was on the executive committee of the St. Louis meeting in 2000, spoke in “tongues” on Thursday evening of the conference. Her tongues went like this: “Shananaa leea, shananaa higha, shananaa nanaa, shananaa leea...” repeated over and over and over.

If you think I’m making fun of these people, you are wrong. This is taken directly from the audiotapes of the messages. If these are languages, they certainly have a simple vocabulary! My children had a more complex language than that when they were still toddlers.

James Robison, a Southern Baptist evangelist who became a Charismatic in the 1980s, spoke at New Orleans in 1987, and though he believes that tongues-speaking is for today he warned that most of it is merely gibberish:

“Most tongues speaking and praying I hear is not in the Spirit. It’s in the flesh. It’s accommodating, because so much pressure was heaped on people to conform that they finally give in and begin imitating each other. They don’t have a language of the Spirit; they’ve got tragedy. There’s no power; there’s no energy; there’s no life; there’s just a bunch of gibberish! It’s very sad.”

At the press conference two days later, I referred to this statement in questioning conference leader Vinson Synan about the tongues that were spoken at the conference. I asked Synan and the other conference leader, Sklorenko, if they “believed that much of the unintelligible noises which are being made by the people could be human induced?” This touched a sore spot, and I was attacked even by members of the press. Two of them angrily said that they did not believe Robison said such a thing, but it is on the audio tape. After these two individuals calmed down somewhat, Synan challenged me to prove that the tongues at the conference were not real languages, saying:

“If I hear a guy from India speaking Hindi, to me that’s unintelligible babbling. It may be a perfectly good language. And how do you know, or how does anyone know, what language these people may be speaking in? I mean, can you prove that?”

The answer to Synan's challenge is not difficult. In the churches we have started in South Asia, there are at least ten different mother tongues among the members. Though I do not understand most of these, I recognize immediately that a real language is being spoken. You can hear the many different words; even a small child has a vocabulary of hundreds of different words in his language. You can hear the precise intonation; the sentence and thought structure as phrases, clauses and sentences are started and stopped; the punctuation. Every language is composed of these familiar characteristics.

The "tongues" that are spoken in the modern Charismatic movement are not languages. They are not earthly languages nor heavenly languages nor prayer languages nor languages of any sort. They are unintelligible mutterings; repetitious silliness. At best, they are pathetic attempts to release the control of the tongue and imitate a divine miracle.

*CHARISMATIC TONGUES IGNORE THE PURPOSE OF BIBLICAL TONGUES,
WHICH WAS A SIGN TO THE JEWISH NATION*

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, tells us exactly why God gave tongues to the early churches:

"Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe" (1 Corinthians 14:20-22).

In this passage, Paul was trying to make the Corinthian church understand God's purpose in giving tongues. He quotes a prophecy from Isaiah 28 and applies it directly to New Testament tongues. The prophecy was that God would speak in foreign tongues to the Jewish nation as a sign, yet they would not believe it and they would be judged. **THUS, TONGUES WERE A SIGN TO THE NATION ISRAEL.** It was a sign to them that God was going to send the gospel to all nations and create a new spiritual body composed both of Jews and Gentiles. Every time tongues were spoken in the book of Acts Jews were present. Israel rejected that sign as they did the sign of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; and they continued stubbornly in their blindness and unbelief. God turned to the Gentiles to take out of the Gentile nations a people for his name. That is what God has been doing these past 2,000 years since the ascension of Christ. That is what the "church age" is all about. And that is what the sign of tongues indicated to the Jews. One day God will again turn His attention to the nation Israel and the prophecies for Israel will be fulfilled literally during the Great Tribulation, the glorious return of Christ, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The divine purpose for tongues soon ceased as the gospel was carried far beyond Israel to all the Gentile nations. This is why we see so little about tongues after Pentecost. There are a couple of other mentions in Acts (the final time in Acts 19), then the references in 1 Corinthians 12-14. That is all. That is all God says about tongues in the entire New Testament! And most of what is said is corrective because of the carnality and error that prevailed at Corinth.

Friends, the miraculous tongues of the first century were not “bubblyida bubblyida bubblyida bubblyida”! Apostolic tongues were not something that could be taught or learned. They did not start with baby languages.

Beware of the confusion of modern “tongues.”

[Distributed by Way of Life Literature's Fundamental Baptist Information Service, a listing for Fundamental Baptists and other fundamentalist, Bible-believing Christians. Our goal in this particular aspect of our ministry is not devotional but is TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO ASSIST PREACHERS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS APOSTATE HOUR. This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the list. If somehow you have subscribed unintentionally, following are the instructions for removal. The Fundamental Baptist Information Service mailing list is automated. To SUBSCRIBE or to UNSUBSCRIBE or to CHANGE ADDRESSES or to RE-SUBSCRIBE UNDER A NEW ADDRESS, go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbis/subscribe.html>. If you have any trouble with this, please let us know. And please be patient with us. We do not ignore any unsubscribe request, but we cannot always get to your request immediately as each person involved with maintaining the Way of Life web site does this only on a very part time basis and is busy with many other major activities, such as pastoring and missionary work. We take up a quarterly offering to fund this ministry, and those who use the materials are expected to participate (Galatians 6:6). Some of these articles are from O Timothy magazine, which is in its 23rd year of publication. Way of Life publishes many helpful books. The catalog is located at the web site: <http://www.wayoflife.org/catalog/catalog.htm> Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061. 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org). We do not solicit funds from those who do not agree with our preaching and who are not helped by these publications, but for those who are, OFFERINGS can be made at <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/offering.html> PAYPAL offerings can be made to <https://www.paypal.com/xclick/business=dcloud%40wayoflife.org>]